



“Voice of the Western Slope Since 1953”

A coalition of individuals, businesses and local governments

www.club20.org

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July 19, 2012

The Honorable Rob Bishop, Chairman
The Honorable Raul Grijalva, Ranking Member
House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: HR 6089 Healthy Forest Management Act 2012

Dear Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Grijalva:

CLUB 20, the 59 year old non-partisan coalition of businesses, individuals, non-profits, and local governments representing members from 22 counties in Western Colorado, urges your support of HR 6089, the Healthy forest Management Act 2012. CLUB 20 has a long history of supporting policies that place the responsibility for management of public lands in the purview of local public lands managers along with local governments and policy makers. Seventy percent of the land in Western Colorado is owned by the Federal government; because of that CLUB 20's member counties are extremely familiar with issues associated with management of public lands and the impacts communities face as a result of management decisions.

The bark beetle epidemic in Western Colorado has placed our public lands and our communities at risk of catastrophic wildfire. Colorado is also experiencing a significant drought this year which adds to the fire danger. Indeed, we have already seen record wildfires wreck havoc in many areas of the state. The deteriorating conditions of our forests have created a potentially devastating scenario whereby the livelihoods, homes and businesses of those living in Western Colorado may be lost.

Our communities have always engaged on every level possible with entities like the Forest Service and BLM to provide input regarding the local management plans for the federal lands near our communities. While the local public land managers and the local residents understand the dynamics required for a healthy forest, the plans developed by these knowledgeable individuals are often disregarded when it comes to the implementation of final public lands management plans. The result is that the forests on the public lands in Western Colorado are deteriorating. There is a desperate need for hazardous fuels reductions on these lands and there is a critical need for expanded safety zones around our communities. Recent wildfires in Colorado have burned hundreds of miles of forests; rules that provide for half mile to one mile safety zones are not adequate.

The beetle infestation in the West could have been mitigated and it could have been prevented from reaching epidemic proportions had there been the ability for local state and federal entities to engage in an expedited emergency plan to address the issue in the early stages. The decision, as written in the 2000 GAO report that justified ignoring a beetle infested blow-down in Colorado as a necessary sacrifice for the environment, demonstrates a failure to understand the long term ramifications of local

forest related issues. As a result of that blow-down, there are now approximately 4 million acres of beetle killed trees throughout Wyoming and Colorado; it is an environmental nightmare.

The cost of fighting wildfires is immensely more expensive than properly managing the forests and lands owned by the Federal Government. Unfortunately, the rules that govern public lands do not allow for timely removal of hazardous fuels on our public lands. The rules governing salvage logging sales take so much time to gain approval that the timber is usually unsuitable for use by the time a sale is authorized. Additionally, the limited stewardship contracts offered are for such a short timeframe that businesses bidding on the contracts cannot obtain capital to underwrite the effort. The stewardship contracts need to be issued for longer periods, preferably 20 years so that a reasonable business plan can be written and executed.

It is time that local and state governments have a greater voice in the management of the public lands in Western Colorado and throughout the nation. The Governor in conjunction with local county commissioners needs to have the flexibility to work with local public land managers to designate high-risk areas in the National Forests and on BLM lands and to act quickly to implement a strategy for addressing the situation. The process to authorize expedited hazardous fuels reduction needs to be driven locally to prevent the loss of life, property, infrastructure and livelihoods in our communities. Local communities and states need to be afforded the opportunity to enter into cooperative agreements with state foresters that allow them to provide forest, rangeland and watershed protection services on applicable federal lands.

The deterioration of our National Forests and lands under the jurisdiction of the BLM not only puts local communities and citizens in a dangerous situation, it negatively impacts the health of the wildlife in the area, the agricultural interests that depend on properly managed lands for supplemental grazing, the tourism economy and clean water sheds for our communities.

CLUB 20 urges your support for the passage of HR6089 and thanks you for considering our input on this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bonnie J. Petersen", written in a cursive style.

Bonnie Petersen
Executive Director

Copies to: Colorado Congressional Delegation
Governor Hickenlooper
Western Colorado Legislators